



Postal Service Workers

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Job Overview

Each week, the U.S. Postal Service delivers billions of pieces of mail to California homes and businesses including letters, bills, advertisements, and packages. To do this in an efficient and timely manner, the Postal Service employs about 90,000 California workers. Most of these workers represent Postal Service Clerks, Postal Service Mail Carriers, and Postal Service Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators.

Postal Service Clerks (also known as window clerks) sell stamps, money orders, postal stationery, mailing envelopes, and boxes. They also weigh packages to determine postage and check that packages are in satisfactory condition for mailing.

Postal Service Mail Carriers, designated as either City or Rural Carriers, deliver mail once it has been processed and sorted. Duties of city and rural carriers are similar, although rural carriers usually drive their own vehicles. Most travel established routes, delivering and collecting mail. Mail Carriers start work at the post office early in the morning to arrange the mail in delivery sequence.

Postal Service Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators prepare incoming and outgoing mail for distribution. These workers are commonly referred to as mail handlers, distribution clerks, mail processors, or mail processing clerks. They load and unload postal trucks and move mail around mail processing centers with forklifts, small electric tractors, or hand-pushed carts. They also load and operate mail processing, sorting, and canceling machinery.

Typical Tasks

Postal Service Clerks

- ➔ Answer questions regarding mail regulations and procedures, postage rates, and post office boxes.
- ➔ Check mail in order to ensure correct postage and that packages and letters are in proper condition for mailing.
- ➔ Complete forms regarding changes of address, or theft or loss of mail, or for special services such as registered or priority mail.
- ➔ Feed mail into postage canceling devices or hand stamp mail to cancel postage.
- ➔ Keep money drawers in order, and record and balance daily transactions.

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- ➔ Obtain signatures from recipients of registered or special delivery mail.
- ➔ Provide customers with assistance in filing claims for mail theft, or lost or damaged mail.
- ➔ Put undelivered parcels away, retrieve them when customers come to claim them, and complete any related documentation.
- ➔ Receive letters and parcels, and place mail into bags.
- ➔ Register, certify, and insure letters and parcels.

Postal Service Mail Carriers

- ➔ Bundle mail in preparation for delivery or transportation to relay boxes.
- ➔ Load and unload trays, containers of mail, and parcels that weigh up to 70 lbs. into and out of vehicle.
- ➔ Deliver mail to residences and business establishments along specified routes by walking and/or driving, using a combination of satchels, carts, cars, and small trucks. Shoulder satchels weigh as much as 35 lbs.
- ➔ Enter change of address orders into computers that process forwarding address stickers.
- ➔ Hold mail for customers who are away from delivery locations.
- ➔ Leave notices telling patrons where to collect mail that could not be delivered.
- ➔ Maintain accurate records of deliveries.
- ➔ Meet schedules for the collection and return of mail.
- ➔ Record address changes and redirect mail for those addresses.
- ➔ Return incorrectly addressed mail to senders.
- ➔ Return to the post office with mail collected from homes, businesses, and public mailboxes.

Postal Service Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators

- ➔ Accept and check containers of mail from large volume mailers, couriers, and contractors.
- ➔ Bundle, label, and route sorted mail to designated areas depending on destinations and according to established procedures and deadlines.
- ➔ Cancel letter or parcel post stamps by hand.
- ➔ Check items to ensure that addresses are legible and correct, that sufficient postage has been paid or the appropriate documentation is attached, and that items are in a suitable condition for processing.
- ➔ Clear jams in sorting equipment.
- ➔ Direct items according to established routing schemes, using computer controlled keyboards or voice recognition equipment.
- ➔ Distribute incoming mail into the correct boxes or pigeonholes.
- ➔ Dump sacks of mail onto conveyors for culling and sorting.
- ➔ Load and unload mail trucks, sometimes lifting containers of mail onto equipment that transports items to sorting stations.
- ➔ Move containers of mail, using equipment such as forklifts and automated "trains."

*Detailed descriptions of these occupations may be found in the Occupational Information Network (O*NET) at online.onetcenter.org.*

Important Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities

- Active Listening — Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
- Clerical — Knowledge of administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
- Customer and Personal Service — Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
- Geography — Knowledge of principles and methods for describing the features of land, including physical characteristics, locations, and interrelationships.
- Mathematics — Knowledge of arithmetic.
- Written Comprehension — The ability to read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
- Perceptual Speed — The ability to quickly and accurately compare similarities and differences among sets of letters, numbers, objects, pictures, or patterns. The things to be compared may be presented at the same time or one after the other. This ability also includes comparing a presented object with a remembered object.
- Spatial Orientation — The ability to know your location in relation to the environment or to know where other objects are in relation to you.
- Stamina — The ability to exert yourself physically over long periods of time without getting winded or out of breath.

Work Environment

Postal Service Clerks usually work in the public portion of clean, well-ventilated, and well-lit buildings. They have a variety of duties and frequent contact with the public, but they rarely work at night. However, they may have to deal with upset customers and must stand for long periods.

Most Mail Carriers begin work early in the morning—those with routes in a business district can start as early as 4 a.m. Overtime hours are frequently required for city Carriers. Carriers spend most of their time outdoors, delivering mail in all kinds of weather. Even those who drive often must walk when making deliveries and must lift heavy sacks of parcel post items when loading their vehicles. In addition, Carriers must be cautious of potential hazards on their routes. Wet and icy roads and sidewalks can be treacherous, and each year dogs attack numerous Carriers.

Despite the use of automated equipment, the work of Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators can be physically demanding. Workers may have to move heavy sacks of mail around a mail processing center. These workers are usually on their feet, reaching for sacks and trays of mail or placing packages and bundles into sacks and trays. Processing mail can be tiring and boring. Many Sorters, Processors, and Machine Operators work at night or on weekends, because most large post offices process mail around the clock, and the largest volume of mail is sorted during the evening and night shifts.

Postal Service Workers may belong to the National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU) or the American Postal Workers Union (APWU, AFL-CIO).

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California's Job Outlook and Wages

The California Outlook and Wage table below represents the occupation across all industries.

Standard Occupational Classification	Estimated Number of Workers 2004	Estimated Number of Workers 2014	Average Annual Openings	2006 Wage Range (per hour)
Postal Service Clerks				
43-5051	8,100	8,100	210	\$20.45 to \$25.63
Postal Service Mail Carriers				
43-5052	37,100	37,100	1,160	\$20.26 to \$25.49
Postal Service Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators				
43-5053	23,800	23,800	630	\$18.12 to \$24.83

Average annual openings include new jobs plus net replacements.

Source: www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov, Employment Projections by Occupation and OES Employment & Wages by Occupation, Labor Market Information Division, Employment Development Department.

Trends

Employment of Postal Service workers is expected to grow much slower than average through 2014. Still, many jobs will become available because of the need to replace those who retire or leave the occupation for other reasons. Those seeking jobs as Postal Service workers can expect to encounter keen competition. The number of applicants should continue to exceed the number of job openings because of the occupation's low entry requirements and attractive wages and benefits.

Efforts by the Postal Service to provide better service may somewhat increase the demand for Postal Service Clerks, but the demand will be offset by the use of electronic communication, such as e-mail, on-line bill payment, and private delivery companies. Employment of Mail Sorters, Processors, and Processing Machine Operators is expected to decline because of the increasing use of automated materials handling equipment and optical character readers, barcode sorters, and other automated sorting equipment.

Training/Requirements/Apprenticeships

The most current information about training requirements, upcoming exams, and job openings is found at the USPS Web site at www.usps.com/employment.

Basic requirements for Postal Service jobs include the following:

- ➔ Must be 18 years old or older.
- ➔ U.S. citizenship, or granted permanent resident-alien status in the United States.
- ➔ Males must have registered with the Selective Service upon reaching age 18.
- ➔ Must have basic competency of English.
- ➔ Qualification based on a written examination that measures speed and accuracy at checking names and numbers and the ability to memorize mail distribution procedures.
- ➔ Must pass a physical examination and drug test.

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- ➡ May be asked to demonstrate lifting and handling mail sacks weighing 70 lbs.
- ➡ Must have a current California Driver License, a good driving record, and at least two years of documented driving experience.

Relatively few people become full-time Postal Clerks or Mail Carriers on their first job because of keen competition and the customary waiting period of one to two years or more after passing the examination. Many begin as temporary workers who are hired during holiday seasons when the amount of mail increases dramatically.

Recommended High School Course Work

High school students can take classes in English, business, algebra, and drivers education to prepare for these jobs.

Where Do I Find the Job?

Each Postal Service job title has an examination number assigned to it, which will be necessary to know when looking at job vacancies on the USPS Web site at www.usps.com/employment.

Job seekers can look at exam announcements by area, read job vacancies, and complete applications on-line. Once applications are accepted, applicants are sent packets of information with a scheduled Postal Service exam date. Exam information is also available at Federal Job Information Centers located in major metropolitan areas.

Where Can the Job Lead?

Full-time Postal Service Workers may bid for preferred assignments, such as the day shift or a high-level non-supervisory position. Postal Carriers can look forward to obtaining preferred routes as their seniority increases. Postal Service Workers can advance to supervisory positions such as first-line supervisor on a competitive basis.

Related Occupations

Truck Drivers, Light or Delivery Services (see Logistics Profile)
Couriers and Messengers (see Logistics Profile)
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand (see Logistics Profile)
Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity (see Occupational Guide No. 2)
Bus Drivers, School (see Occupational Guide No. 578)

Other Sources

American Postal Workers Union, AFL-CIO
www.apwu.org

National Postal Mail Handlers Union
www.npmhu.org

United States Postal Service Employment Center
www.usps.com/employment

